

Organizing an Lesson—Interactive Strategies and Common Classroom Language

As an international TA, you might not be familiar with the interactive nature of a TA-led lab or section. TAs are a bridge between the professor and the students, who will want to be able to ask you questions and to actively participate in section. Here are some strategies to follow as you plan your lesson and some common language used in U.S. classrooms.

- 1. Write the lesson topic on the board or show it on ppt title slide.** This step encourages us to give students a general idea (and visual reinforcement) of what we will be talking about in the current lesson—rather than simply launching into an explanation of details.
- 2. Introduce this topic and give us a context for it** (what field it's from, a reference to an everyday application of this concept, etc.). Your goal at this point is to connect your students to the topic and build their interest in what you are going to teach them (what do they already know about this topic? What questions might they have? How will your lesson answer those questions?)

- *Today we're gonna talk about _____*
- *Today's topic is _____*
- *This is a fundamental topic in the field of _____*
- *This topic is related to _____*
- *Has anyone ever heard of _____?*
- *What do you guys know about _____?*
- *So, why do we need to learn about _____? Well, this is very important for _____.*
- *We all watch cartoons, right? But have you ever thought about how the animation works in a cartoon? Well, today you'll find out.*

- 3. Give us an overview of the subtopics.** This might be as straightforward as:

1. Definition
2. Example
3. Application

- *Before we get started, let me give you an overview of what we'll be talking about today. First, I'll define (this concept), then I'll give you examples of it, and finally, we'll work together to apply it to another(situation/problem/context).*

Or it might be a classification of subtopics:

1. Subtopic 1
2. Subtopic 2

- *There are two main (features/points/issues/concepts/problems) that we need to look at in order to understand (how this works, what this means, etc.)*
- *This topic can be divided into two main subtopics: _____ and _____*

Or some other logical outline of your main points.

NOTE: It is a good idea to put the outline/overview on the board even if you are using ppt so that you can refer to it as you move through the subtopics.

4. Check to make sure everyone understands what the lesson is going to be about:

- *So, is everybody clear on what we'll be talking about today?*
- *Does anyone have any questions before we get started?*

5. Introduce your first main point, then provide some details.

- *So, let's get started. The first thing we need to look at is _____*
- *So let's first look at what we mean by (topic).*
- *The first main point we need to cover is _____*
- *First of all, I'd like to discuss _____*
- *I'll start by giving you a definition.*
- *Now let's consider this in more detail.*

6. Check for comprehension after each subtopic or point. Remember that the students, if they are confused, might have difficulty articulating their questions so give them a little time or articulate it yourself:

- *So, does everyone understand what we mean by _____?*
- *Are there any questions on this?*
- *Does this make sense to everyone?*
- *Are you following me so far?*
- *Some of you look kind of confused. Are you sure there are no questions?*
- *Some of you are probably asking yourselves the following question:*

7. Transition to the next point.

- *OK, if there are no more questions about (the point we just discussed), let's move on to the (next, second, third, final) point.*
- *Now that we've defined _____, let's look at some examples.*
- *Now that we've covered (point #1), let's move on to (point #2). (Be sure to point at the overview outline that you wrote on the board to visually reinforce the transition to a new subtopic).*

8. Ask your students questions to make sure everyone is actually following you.

- *Take a minute to review your notes and make sure you can explain how this works.*
- *What do you think are the major problems associated with this process?*
- *Any ideas how we could apply this concept?*
- *Can you foresee any potential problems with this process?*
- *Do you remember the example I gave you a minute ago? How does it apply here?*
- *What do you think the next step should be?*

9. **Also encourage students to ask you questions.** Their questions help you understand what isn't clear to them. Here are some steps you can follow:

Acknowledge the question

- *Good question! I'm glad you asked that.*
- *That's a very interesting question. Let me think about that for a minute.*

Clarify it if you're not sure you've understood completely

- *I'm not sure I understood your question. Could you ask it again?*
- *If I understand you correctly, what you're asking is _____*
- *So what you want to know is _____*

Answer clearly or explain why you can't

- *That's a complicated question but the short answer is this:*
- *I'm not sure about that—let me ask the professor and I'll get back to you next time.*
- *That's a bit off-topic—let's talk about it during break or in my office hours, OK?*

Check to make sure the answer is satisfactory

- *Did I answer your question?*
- *Does that make sense?*
- *Is that what you wanted to know?*

10. **Save a bit of time at the end of the lesson to wrap up and review what has been taught.**

- *Any final questions?*
- *So today we talked about _____. We looked at what this term means, went over a few examples, and applied it to a new problem.*
- *The key point in today's class is this:*
- *What you really need to remember from today's lecture is this:*
- *Next time, we'll look at _____*
- *Please come see me if you have questions.*
- *OK, so that's it for today.*
- *Have a good weekend.*